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GENERAL AND COMPLETE DISARMAMENT: TRANSPARENCY IN ARMAMENTS

Report of the Secretary-General

Addendum

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II. REPLIES RECEIVED FROM GOVERNMENTS

AUSTRALIA

[Original: English]

[17 August 1995]

1. Australia is a strong supporter of the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms and has lodged annual returns in all three years since its inception. By providing universal and non-discriminatory practical means to increase openness and transparency in the field of armaments, the Register constitutes a key element in efforts to reduce mistrust and miscalculation in the security environment. Participation in the Register is a means through which States can signal their preparedness to enter into a dialogue with other States on this aspect of their security policy. This can provide valuable input into bilateral and regional dialogue on security concerns and encourage the evolution of a more cooperative approach to security.

2. Australia strongly supports moves to enhance the effectiveness of the Register. Adjustments to existing definitions for the seven equipment categories, the addition of new categories and the expansion of the scope of the Register are all measures which have the potential to make the Register more relevant and useful as a means of increasing transparency in armaments, and which merit further exploration. Australia is disappointed that the group of governmental experts failed in 1994 to reach substantive agreement on the questions of additional categories and the expansion of the Register to cover holdings and also procurement through national production. We welcome the decision to convene in 1997 a further group of governmental experts to report to the Secretary-General on the continuing operation of the Register and its further development, and hope that group will be able to arrive at a consensus on such issues.

3. Australia sees the Ad Hoc Committee on Transparency in Armaments of the Conference on Disarmament as an important forum for constructive discussion of ways to enhance the operation of the Register, especially pending the convening of the next group of governmental experts in 1997. The fact that there have been numerous practical proposals put forward in the Ad Hoc Committee over the last two years is testament to the significance and relevance of this topic to the work of the Conference on Disarmament, and to the extend to which the efforts of the Committee members has contributed to the broader examination of the operation and further development of the Register. We look forward to continuing attention to this topic in the Ad Hoc Committee.

4. Australia believes that the promotion of broader participation in the Register is an important means of enhancing its effectiveness. Securing wider adherence to the present Register would not only increase the usefulness of the information on transfers provided by the Register, it would foster the development of international norms on transparency and disclosure in the field of armaments and help ensure widespread support for any expansion of the

Register. Australia, therefore, actively supports bilateral and multilateral efforts to encourage more Member States to participate in the Register.

5. Australia also believes there is scope for improving the operation of the Register through enhancing the quality of the data provided by participating States. In particular, discrepancies and mismatches between the returns lodged by arms importing and exporting States could be minimized by the consistent and uniform interpretation and application of the standard definitions and through bilateral discussions aimed at harmonizing the methodologies used in the collection and reporting of data on their respective arms transfers. Moreover, reviews of the operation of the Register, such as those carried out by the groups of governmental experts, could examine how the consistency, reliability and clarity of the current methods of reporting might be enhanced.

6. Australia believes that in the area of transparency, as in other matters of international security, global measures can usefully be complemented by regional efforts. These constitute an important means of addressing the specific regional security context. A concrete example is the discussion of transparency approaches - including the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms - in the Asia-Pacific, through the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) Regional Forum. Positive references to the Register have been included in the Chairman's statements issued at both the inaugural meeting of the Regional Forum in 1994 and its second meeting in 1995.